

The Kruta Bakery in Collinsville, Illinois

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“*Bakery*: A place where products such as bread, cake, and pastries are baked or sold.”

This is the definition that *The American Heritage Dictionary* gives for bakery. Many people would agree that this definition is sufficient enough to describe any bakery, but Kruta Bakery is much more than this.

Frank Kruta, Sr. and his brother started the Kruta Bakery. Frank Kruta’s wife also worked in the bakery. It originally sold cakes, doughnuts, and pastries. It opened in 1919 in East St. Louis. Frank Kruta used to take silver dollars and throw them into the bread dough to try and get people to buy the bread, even though the business was very successful. Frank’s wife could not write in English very well so when she wrote on the cakes and there was not enough room to write “happy birthday” or a name of someone, she just left the last letters off because she could not read the name.

About this time, the family also opened two other bakeries in Illinois. Later, in 1974, they moved Kruta Bakery to Collinsville, Illinois. When they moved the bakery to Collinsville, the residents of East St. Louis started a petition to keep the bakery open there. The Krutas still moved to Collinsville because they had experienced some robberies and burglaries in East St. Louis. Even with a large kitchen and a staff of 24, one of the biggest problems that Kruta Bakery first encountered was not being able to keep up with the demand for their products. After the bakery had been in Collinsville for 14 years, it was the first recipient of the “Business of the Month” award.

This bakery has been baking for over 70 years and it has always been in the Kruta family. Since the bakery moved to Collinsville, the Krutas have not opened any more bakeries. The busiest times are around Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, Halloween, and Graduation. During these times, the bakery has to hire around 30 employees. Workers at the counter are traditionally women in white uniforms.

Kruta Bakery makes everything from scratch. Even though many grocery stores have their own bakeries, there does not seem to be a shortage of customers who would rather have baked goods made from scratch. Their best selling items are the holiday bread, cheesecake, and gooey butter cake. The holiday break is a two-pound festive round of bread sweetened with white raisins inside the dough and is made from an Old World recipe. It is only made on holidays, which makes it special. The popular cheesecake is a rich and creamy cheesecake mix on the top of a sweet sourdough roll. The gooey butter cake is a favorite St. Louis area item. “Kruta’s Bakery’s gooey butter cake should be placed on the map, it is so good. It is always worth the drive,” according to a St. Louis web site. Most people would willingly wait for hours for the gooey butter cake. Each of these items has individually drawn in customers from all over the years.

Kruta Bakery has been in the Kruta family for four generations and has been a very successful business. It is very well known in Collinsville as well as the surrounding areas. [From “Best Bakery, Kruta Collinsville, Ill.,” *River Front Times*, Sept. 26, 2001; “Colorful entry,” *Collinsville Herald Journal*, July 1989; “Kruta Bakery,” *Belleville News Democrat*; and student historian’s interview with Jim Kruta, Oct. 10, 2005.]